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CPW Report No. 56--USSR

19TH ALL-UNION COMMUNIST PARTY CONGRESS IN MOSCOW

REFERENCES TO SHORTCOMINGS

in Speeches by

Mikoyan, Shayakhmetov, Brezhnev,

Mgeladze, Kalnberzin, Arutinov,

Razzakov and others.

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SECRET

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Traces of the old Soviet manipulative attitude toward such issues as the standard of living and consumer welfare are still very much in evidence in Mikoyan's speech to the 19th Communist Party Congress (12 October). Comparative and percentage figures are used liberally but the absolute criteria on which they are based, in most cases the 1940 level, are familiarly missing. The following reference to sugar production, for example, is typical. By the end of 1952, says Mikoyan, the sugar industry's output will be 50% above the prewar level, and it is expected to be double the 1940 figure by the end of the current Five Year Plan. All these optimistic estimates preclude even an approximate assessment of the actual volume of sugar production now since the 1940 figures have never been released. Similar ambiguities are employed also in the discussion of the "ever growing" supplies of fish, meat products, animal fats and other staple foodstuffs.

Although the revelation of per capita food consumption is conscientiously avoided in all official Soviet pronouncements, for obvious propagandistic reasons, even the total figures are often juggled in such a way as to make a specious argument sound real. This is particularly evident from Mikoyan's comparison of meat production in the Soviet Union and the United States:

Whereas in the USA meat production in 1951 was 437 thousand tons less than in 1946, in the USSR it increased by 709,000 tons during the same period.

Russian version:

Esli v Soedinennyykh Shtatakh proizvodstvo myasa v 1951 godu po sravneniu s 1946 godom upalo na 437 tys. tonn, to v Sovetskoy Soyuz za etot zhe period proizvodstvo myasa uvelichilos na 709 tys. tonn.

The above figures reveal exactly nothing since the curtailed meat production in the United States may still, and undoubtedly does, greatly exceed in volume the increased output of the Soviet meat industry. The same uninformative comparison is used to juxtapose the falling food prices in the USSR with the "unjustifiably" growing prices in the capitalist countries. The price of bread in the USA, for instance, is said to have increased by 28% since the end of 1947, in Britain by 90% and in France by more than double. In the USSR, on the other hand, the same period saw a decrease in bread prices by 2.5 times.

Mikoyan feels compelled to admit, however, that despite the above-mentioned great increase in the production of meat products in the country, the population's requirements are still not fully met for the odd reason that "the demand is growing faster than production" (spros uvelichivayetsya bystreye proizvodstva). Here again no specific details on consumption are offered. Soviet officials, it should be pointed out, have never hesitated to cite absolute figures wherever they were thought to be sufficiently impressive, as for example the frequent references to the eight-billion pud grain harvest or the number of tractors and combines available in a particular area. Mikoyan's consistent avoidance of specific data in regard to the distribution and consumption of food is perhaps best explained in his passing allusion to the available market supplies (rynochniy fond). Thus reviewing the production of fats in the USSR, he points to a 2.7 times increase by the end of the current Five Year Plan. Both animal and vegetable fats, it is inferred, are available, but the reason certain rayons are still experiencing a shortage of those products is because "the population's purchasing power is growing faster than the market supplies" (pokupatel'naya sposobnost naselenia rastet bystreye chem rynochnie fondy).

Among the shortcomings referred to as such are the inadequate supplies of dehydrated potatoes and vegetables, powdered milk, and a long list of factory-canned goods including boxed breakfasts. A greater supply of such products, he says, would serve the dual purpose of introducing more variety into the Soviet diet and lightening the housewives' burden. The sale of such foodstuffs, however, is so far "confined to large cities" and is admittedly very limited.

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The output of the fishing industry has gone up 70% above the 1940 level which is familiarly left undisclosed, and deep-sea fishing now accounts for 66% of the total as compared with 48% before the war. Whether or not these percentage figures are authentic is irrelevant inasmuch as the total Soviet fish-catch has never been published. Nor does Mikoyan's reference to the main fishing grounds provide any clue to the availability of fish supplies:

However, while the catches in the Murmansk and the Baltic fishing grounds are increasing satisfactorily, progress in the Azov, Black Sea, Caspian and Far Eastern fishing grounds is still poor.

Russian version:

Odnako, esli khorosho rastet dobycha ryby v Murmanskom i Baltiyskom basseynakh, to eshche slabo idet delo v Azovo-Chernomorskom, Kaspiyskom i Dalnevostochnom basseynakh.

With the quantitative aspect of the food problem more or less assured, says Mikoyan, it is high time to look into the quality of the people's diet. Just like in industry, it appears to require a concerted nationwide drive to improve it. Scientist Pavlov is quoted as having said that "normal healthy food is food consumed with appetite, with gusto" (normalnaya i poleznaya eda est eda s appetitom, eda s ispytyvayemym naslazhdeniem). That the nutritive value of many food items still leaves much to be desired may be gathered from Mikoyan's appeal for a higher "sugar content" (sahharistost) and "oil content" (maslichnost) of sunflower seed oil. Another way of improving the nation's appetite, as suggested by the speaker, is a considerable increase in the production of drinks to be taken with food. There has been some improvement in that branch of industry, but considerably greater stocks of beer, cognac, vodka and champagne are promised at the end of the present Five Year Plan.

Of some significance in connection with the farm produce and food problems as a whole is Mikoyan's cautious treatment of the question in the light of the much-publicized transition from Socialism to Communism. The present system of goods turnover, he says quoting Stalin, will be abandoned -- without undue haste but steadily and unswervingly (bez osoboy toroplivosti, no neuklonno i bez kolebaniy) -- and the barter system between State industry and collective farms established. A step in that direction has already been taken with the introduction of "merchandizing" (otovarivanie) agricultural produce by means of State agreements with cotton, flax, sugar beet and other collective farms. This practice is to be expanded with a view to reducing "step by step" (shag z shagom) the sphere of action of the prevalent system of goods turnover. One of the chief hurdles on the way to effectuating the future barter system is the so-called group ownership of the collective farms (kolkhozno-gruppovaya sobstvennost). This will have to be "raised to the national-ownership level" before the system of State merchandizing, referred to as an "embryo" (zachatok) of the future barter system, can be successfully developed into a uniform system of commodity exchange.

Mikoyan does not indicate whether or how the Agricultural Artel Statute (Ustav Selkhozarteli) providing for the mentioned group ownership of collective farms in perpetuity will be affected by the change to the new commodity exchange system. He merely says that Stalin "has outlined the methods" (opredelil puti) of bringing collective farm property up to the level of public property. (The above quotation obviously refers to Stalin's article on "Questions of Economy" published in the September issue of BOLSHEVIK. According to the available incomplete version of that article, Stalin said that collective farm property, which is essentially a form of Socialist property, will not have to be nationalized or made public property to facilitate the introduction of the barter system.) The only changes in the present commodity exchange system between the "city and the village", as vaguely alluded to by Mikoyan, are to be

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made in the goods-distribution organizations:

In this connection there must be a large-scale reorganization in the work of the trade and supply organs in the sphere of exchange between town and country...it is necessary to exclude the surplus collective farm production from the system of goods turnover...and to include it in the barter system between State industry and collective farms.

Russian version:

V svyazi s etim dolzhna proizoiiti bolshaya perestroika raboty trgovco-zagotovitelnykh organov v oblasti obmena mezhdu gorodom i derevney...neobkhodimo...vykluchit izlishki kolkhoznogo proizvodstva iz sistemy tovarnogo obrashchenia i vkluchit ikh v sistemu produktoobmena mezhdu gosudarstvennoy promyshlennostyu i kolkhozami.

Listed below are some of the economic and ideological shortcomings recited on the floor of the Congress by the regional Party bosses. One of the most articulate critics of the Republican as well as all-Union agricultural organizations is Shayakhmetov of Kazakh SSR. The Kazakh livestock industry, he says, is still far behind the planned tempo of development because some of the other branches of agriculture on which it depends are not doing their share. Fodder procurement is far too inadequate, there are not enough cattle sheds and all the work involved in hay processing and stockpiling is still largely unmechanized. The USSR Ministry of Agriculture has not only lost interest in the Republic's cattle industry and other agricultural organizations but also appears to "restrain their initiative in the mechanization of the stock-breeding industry and the establishment of a stable fodder base" (sderzhivayet ikh initsiativu po mekhanizatsii protsessov zhivotnovodstva, po sozdaniu ustoychivoy kormovoy bazy). The feed situation is indeed so bad, according to Shayakhmetov, that in a number of places the indispensable "emergency reserves" (strakhovye zapasy) of fodder have not been made available. The machine-tractor stations and the motor pools of the cattle industry, he concludes, will henceforth require the Party's concentrated attention before a higher level of agricultural development can be attained.

Brezhnev of Moldavian SSR complains of the great disproportion (nesootvetstvie) between the capital investments in the food industry and those in the construction organizations for house-building purposes. These industries, he says, have been unable to cope with the mentioned problem, which should therefore be solved by the appropriate all-Union bodies: "We are therefore badly in need of the help of the USSR (Food) Ministry and the State Planning Commission" (Potomu my seryozno nuzhdayemsa v pomoshchi etogo ministerstva i Gosplana SSSR). We are still lagging far behind (my eshche seryozno otstayem) in the utilization of the available machine-tractor stations, Brezhnev concludes, but does not amplify the point beyond the remark that the gross grain harvest should be raised still further.

Muratov of Tatar ASSR speaks of the serious shortcomings in the work of the Republic's oil industry. Accidents and idle drilling equipment (avarii, prostoi burovogo oborudovaniya) are referred to as common features of the industry's activities, while the production of building materials and housing construction are said to be beset by great difficulties (bolshimi trudnostyami).

Mgeladze of Georgian SSR points to the agricultural adversities brought on by inclement weather during the past two years. Most of the citrus fruit plantations, he discloses, were killed by severe frosts, and the Republic has not yet recuperated from those losses. The Georgian Party leadership, he says, still needs a little prodding since some of the (unnamed) officials have recently manifested "political carelessness and a do-nothing attitude" (politicheskaya bespechnost i rotozeistvo).

Kalnberzin of Latvian SSR quotes with approval the severe criticism leveled at the Republic by Malenkov. The shortcomings in industry, agriculture, Party and ideological activities are still numerous, he admits. Certain heads of Ministries, trusts and other industrial organizations are still satisfied with high average indices (vysokimi srednimi pokazatelyami) which usually cover a multitude of failings. The result is that

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many enterprises do not manage to achieve their production targets. Certain Republican Ministries, in violation of State discipline, have disregarded the plan for higher labor efficiency and the output of the required assortment of goods. The turning point (povorot) in Latvia's agricultural progress, says Kalnberzin, came in 1949 when the majority of peasants' holdings were merged into collective farms. Some 98% of those homesteads are now said to come under the collective farm system.

Efimov of Khabarovsk Krai is bitter about the irrational and lopsided administration of the Far Eastern Lumber Industry. The enormous timber resources, he says, are neither processed nor distributed the way they should be. This is particularly evident in the case of Primorye, where the "management" of the lumber industry actually defies common sense. That krai, it is stated, has increased its lumber imports eightfold since 1935 despite the abundant local resources of that raw material, which are more than adequate to meet its requirements. Much of the long haulage of Khabarovsk lumber to the Okhotsk coast, Lower Amur, Kamchatka and Sakhalin, it is claimed, could be similarly dispensed with and should therefore be discontinued.

Gafurov, Tadjik SSR, admits that certain ideological irregularities are still prevalent among the Republic's writers, artists and in the motion picture industry, but insists that lack of proper guidance from the all-Union organizations is to a large extent responsible for them. Referring to the Tadjiki writers as "artists of the word" (khudozhniki slova), he says that a great deal of their "creative passivity" (tvorcheskaya passivnost) is traceable to lack of inspiration from above. I agree with Comrade Bagirov of Azerbaijan SSR, he says, that the head of the USSR's Writers Union, Fadeyev, is guilty of insufficient attention to the development of our national literature. He is even said to "get into an embarrassing situation" (popadayet v neudobnoye polozhenie) every time he tries to criticize the progress of national literature without having studied the question himself. Fadeyev's own articles, presumably to be emulated by other writers, are according to Gafurov, "as a rule harmless abstractions placing no obligations on anyone" (kak pravilo, bezobidnie nikogo ni k chemu ne obyazyvayushchie razsuzhdenia voobshche). Bolshakov, Minister of the USSR Cinema Industry, is said to be just as derelict in his duties to encourage the production of higher quality Tadjik motion pictures.

Arutunov, speaking for Armenian SSR, concedes the recent appearance of "pernicious anti-Marxian theories" (vrednie antimarksistskie teorii) among the Republic's writers and historians. Some of the historians particularly have shown bourgeois-nationalist tendencies in their views on the nation's past: in their references to the fight against Czarism they fail to differentiate between the actual national heroes and the anti-Czarist liberals. This "single stream theory" (teoriya edinogo potoka) which is essentially anti-Bolshevik, is said to be popular with a "certain section" of the Armenian intelligentsia.

Razzakov, Kirghiz SSR, says that the exploitation of the Uzgen Coal Basin, scheduled to begin in the first post war Five Year Plan, is still in the blueprint stage. The coal reserve there, estimated at hundreds of millions of tons, remains in the ground intact because the USSR Ministry of the Coal Industry has for some reason neglected that area. Turning to agriculture, he said that we must not blind ourselves to the "very grave shortcomings" (krupneishie nedostatki) in that branch of the Republican economy, particularly in stock-breeding:

Losses through death and squandering of cattle are still permitted in the collective and State farms of the Republic.

Russian version:

V kolkhozakh i sovkhovakh respubliky dopuskayetsya padezh i razbazarivanie skota.